FLEXION®
VALUE FORWARD

U.S. Forest Services

An ePermitting case study

Challenge

In efforts to modernize and simplify their permitting processes, the U.S. Forest Service wanted to offer "ePermitting" through an online form. They did this by developing different modules that they could integrate with their existing systems in partnership with a GSA 18F team.

Solution

Flexion was awarded a competitive bid to develop a public-facing module allowing users to apply for special use permits through an online form.

Using an agile methodology, we converted the paper-based form into a digital one, basing its look and feel on the U.S. Web Design Standards (USWDS). The online application captured the user's information and routed it to the Forest Service special use administrators where the info was pre populated into the Forest Service's Special Uses Data System (SUDS) via a RESTful Application Protocol Interface (API).

As we developed the form, we conducted usability testing with people who would be using the form—guides who led park tours, representatives from non-profit clubs like the Boy Scouts or YMCA, and the special use administrators themselves. Each round of testing produced user feedback that would then become the next group of user stories we developed.

A large part of this project was also integrating with login.gov, a secure portal used to access government services. We were the first group outside of the login.gov team to successfully complete this integration, paving the way for others to take advantage of its capabilities.

Additionally, we won a second competitive bid to extend the ePermitting process to Christmas tree permits. Every winter, many national forests sell "tags" for Christmas tree cutting, allowing the public to cut down a tree from a designated area of a national forest. We built an application to enable people to purchase and print Christmas tree tags online, offering a much better user experience than the previous model where they could only purchase tags at Forest Service offices and local retailers. In addition to the permits, the application included digital maps to direct users to the appropriate areas within the forests where trees could be cut down.

Results

The public now has easier, more accessible access to these permitting services without limitations like traveling to an office or worrying about business hours. Since usability testing was a key focus of the project, the resulting online forms are not only meeting user needs, but exceeding them.